Vertebral Axial Decompression

Introduction

Vertebral axial decompression is a type of traction for the low back. The idea is to stretch the spine. This stretching is intended to create more space between the bones of the spine (the vertebrae) to relieve pressure on damaged discs. The goal is to relieve low back pain caused by damaged discs or other problems with the vertebrae or tissues. This service is investigational. There are not enough high-quality published medical studies to determine whether this treatment is effective.

Note: The Introduction section is for your general knowledge and is not to be taken as policy coverage criteria. The rest of the policy uses specific words and concepts familiar to medical professionals. It is intended for providers. A provider can be a person, such as a doctor, nurse, psychologist, or dentist. A provider also can be a place where medical care is given, like a hospital, clinic, or lab. This policy informs them about when a service may be covered.

Policy Coverage Criteria

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Procedure</th>
<th>Investigational</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Vertebral axial decompression</td>
<td>Vertebral axial decompression is considered investigational.</td>
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**Coding**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>HCPCS</td>
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<tr>
<td>S9090</td>
<td>Vertebral axial decompression, per session</td>
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**Related Information**

N/A

**Evidence Review**

**Description**

Vertebral axial decompression applies traction to the vertebral column to reduce intradiscal pressure and, in doing so, potentially relieves low back pain associated with herniated lumbar discs or degenerative lumbar disc disease.

**Background**

Vertebral axial decompression (also referred to as mechanized spinal distraction therapy) is used as traction therapy to treat chronic low back pain. Specific devices that are available are described in the **Regulatory Status** section. In general, the patient wears a pelvic harness during treatment and lies prone on a specially equipped table. The table is slowly extended, and a distraction force is applied via the pelvic harness until the desired tension is reached, followed by a gradual decrease of the tension. The cyclic nature of the treatment allows the patient to withstand stronger distraction forces compared with static lumbar traction techniques. An
individual session typically includes 15 cycles of tension, and 10 to 15 daily treatments may be administered.

**Summary of Evidence**

For individuals with chronic lumbar pain who receive vertebral axial decompression, the evidence includes randomized controlled trials (RCTs). Relevant outcomes are symptoms, functional outcomes, quality of life, and treatment-related morbidity. Evidence for the efficacy of vertebral axial decompression on health outcomes is limited. Because a placebo effect may be expected with any treatment that has pain relief as the principal outcome, RCTs with sham controls and validated outcome measures are required. The only sham-controlled randomized trial published to date did not show a benefit of vertebral axial decompression compared with the control group. The evidence is insufficient to determine the effects of the technology on health outcomes.

**Ongoing and Unpublished Clinical Trials**

A search of ClinicalTrials.gov in March 2018 did not identify any ongoing or unpublished trials that would likely influence this policy.

**Practice Guidelines and Position Statements**

No guidelines or statements were identified.

**Medicare National Coverage**

Medicare issued a national noncoverage policy (160.16) for vertebral axial decompression in 1997.6

**Regulatory Status**

Several devices used for vertebral axial decompression have been cleared for marketing by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration through the 510(k) process. Devices include the VAX-D®,
Decompression Reduction Stabilization (DRS®) System, Accu-SPINA® System, DRX-3000®, DRX9000®, SpineMED Decompression Table®, Antalgic-Trak®, Lordex® Traction Unit, and Triton® DTS. According to labeled indications from the FDA, vertebral axial decompression may be used as a treatment modality for patients with incapacitating low back pain and for decompression of the intervertebral discs and facet joints.

Food and Drug Administration product code: ITH

References


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<tr>
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<th>Comments</th>
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<td>12/19/12</td>
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